

Introductory Remarks of

Commissioner Scott Semple

Connecticut Department of Correction

Good morning Chairwomen Janowski, Chairman Duff, and honorable members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee.

I am Scott Semple, nominee for Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Correction. It is indeed an immense honor for me to appear before you today as Governor Dannel P. Malloy's recommendation to lead an agency that I cherish. I am also compelled to acknowledge the Governor's executive team with oversight of criminal justice matters for their continued support and collaboration. Personally, I feel extremely fortunate to be a part of the newly introduced endeavors the Governor has proposed as it relates to Second Chance Society initiatives. I believe these initiatives will serve to further support the significant decline in crime rates that our state has been experiencing, especially as it pertains to enhanced and comprehensive community reentry strategies.

Unfortunately, some of you may be aware that my family has recently experienced the tragic loss of our only child Matthew Joseph Semple. My wife and I are extremely grateful for the support and love that we have and continue to receive from many government officials, friends, family and colleagues. I am especially grateful to our Governor who allowed me the latitude to put off the decision of taking on this immense responsibility during our son's illness. It is also important for me to inform you that my wife and son were a huge influence in helping me make this decision and I am grateful for their steadfast, love, guidance and support. My son put it best when he told me to go be the boss; you complain too much when you take direction from others. I did not have the heart to inform him that despite the title, I still expect to take direction from others.

Today, I would like to share with you some of my professional experiences and achievements that I believe have led to my presence here today. For your review and consideration, I have

also provided my resume and biography that will provide you with more details of my exposures and experiences.

Additionally, I would also like to present you some timely initiatives that will outline the direction this agency is pursuing in the interest of complimenting the Second Chance Society initiatives, coupled with continued enhancement of public safety obligations.

My career in Corrections began in 1988 as a frontline Correction Officer at the maximum security Cheshire Correctional Institution. During my tenure at this site, I achieved the supervisory rank of Lieutenant, which I view to this day as one of the most challenging roles within our agency.

In a desired interest to experience other aspects of the agency, I achieved an assignment as a Training Officer at our nationally accredited training academy, the Maloney Center for Training and Staff Development. My initial assignment served the Enfield Correctional Institution where I was responsible to coordinate and facilitate various agency mandated and facility specific training curricula. Ultimately, through this experience, I was promoted to the rank of Captain and became the agency's Pre-Service Coordinator, which again evolved around training and required oversight of educating all new hires within the agency.

In 1997, I accepted an assignment at our Central Office as one of two designated Public Information Officers. This position afforded me a unique opportunity to gain experience in many aspects of the agency and to interact with various media professionals on a daily basis. It also exposed me to entities outside of the agency within state and federal government.

Fortunately, I was then presented with a promotion to the managerial rank of Major and served for many years as our agency's Legislative Liaison. I view this position as one of the hallmarks of my professional success as it allowed me to further gain a global and comprehensive understanding of the legislature and inner workings of government affairs. This experience often required a heavy, fast paced workload that challenged me to gain unique competencies not typical to traditional roles within the agency. I am forever grateful for having the

opportunity to serve in this role and believe the gained experiences are one of reasons I sit before you today.

In an effort to reacquaint myself with facility exposures and through professional guidance, I was compelled to return back to a correctional setting in a managerial role. This led to my first assignment in a jail setting at the Bridgeport Community Correctional Center. Jails present their own unique set of challenges because you are required to be responsive to an accused offender population coming directly from the community. I was assigned as the Major of Programs and Treatment, which again was a unique experience because the bulk of my facility exposure was more custody driven. During my tenure at this site, I successfully coordinated and implemented a new agency mandated policy to introduce what is referred to as an Orientation Unit. Essentially, all offenders entering the system are initially housed in this type of unit for a prescribed period of time while a comprehensive needs assessment is completed. The establishment of this unit was in response to an upward trend of suicides or attempts that were occurring within the system. These units ultimately led to a substantial decrease in these unfortunate and tragic incidents.

In 2005, I was promoted to Deputy Warden of Programs and Treatment and assigned to the Garner Correctional Facility, which at the time was a facility in transition. The facility was designated by agency leadership to become the primary location for male offenders diagnosed with significant mental health needs. Upon initial assignment and assessment of the facilities program capabilities, it was quickly determined that there were limited program and treatment opportunities for this population. Through a team approach, coupled with dedicated leadership and committed staff, we increased the treatment and programs offerings dramatically. The successful mental health consolidation of this facility significantly lowered the rate of incidents throughout the entire agency. Additionally, the offenders afflicted with mental health related issues were no longer as vulnerable to being exposed to typical general population environments which, as we know, exposed them to manipulation because of their condition.

As a result of the shared success of transforming Garner, in 2009, I became the Warden of that facility. This at the time was the ultimate professional achievement that I hoped to accomplish within my career. Obviously, my presence here today dictated otherwise. I credit the past and present staff of this site for helping me to further enhance my leadership capabilities and allowing me to become a more versatile, productive manager. This role helped me to more fully develop and experience some of the key qualities that are essential to influence a large staffing compliment in an efficient and responsible manner. I would be remiss not to inform you that to this day the Garner Correctional facility continues to be recognized as a national model in the area of mental health treatment within correctional settings.

More recently, in November of 2013, I was appointed by then Commissioner James Dzurenda to be the Deputy Commissioner of Operations and Rehabilitative Services. This position required oversight over all fifteen designated correctional facilities to include the Programs and Treatment Division and Parole/Community Services. As you may be aware, the Connecticut system is one of only six in the country that manages both accused and sentenced populations. Our facilities are essentially designated by numeric security levels from minimum (level 1) to our most maximum (level 5), the Northern Correctional Institution. Other areas of responsibility include oversight of all offender transportation, canine and tactical operations.

Upon the departure and retirement of Commissioner Dzurenda on September 1, 2014, I was asked by Governor Malloy and became the Acting Commissioner of the Department of Correction.

From the start of this assignment, although in an acting capacity, my intention was not to take a status quo approach to leading and directing the agency. Along with ongoing initiatives to adopt national guidelines concerning the reduction of restrictive placement and isolation practices, we needed to ensure stability remained intact and momentum was sustained in this area. I am proud to inform you that Connecticut is recognized as a respected leader as it pertains to this issue. The numbers speak for themselves and are indicative by the placement reductions that have and continue to occur. It remains a work in progress, but we will continue

to work collaboratively with our professional work force, other state entities and various partners.

While I believe that we have made a tremendous amount of progress over the past four years both as a Department and as a criminal justice system, we must do more. I believe that we need to capitalize on the lessons we have learned over the years, and to consolidate our gains. It is for this reason that I have enumerated four specific initiatives which are intended to sharpen our focus as a Department and allow us to position ourselves as a smaller, more flexible and more community-orientated Department of Correction. These proposals are guided by our overarching goal of increased public safety, while increasing efficiency system wide, and my personal commitment to our staff that we will do our very best to reduce trauma associated with working and living in a correctional environment.

The first initiative is the centralization of all community release decision making in a centralized location. The legislature has granted the Commissioner of Correction a great deal of discretion in placing offenders into community settings, such as halfway houses or other community residences, over the past decade. Historically, each individual warden would make these release decisions. With the centralization of this important decision making function, we will improve consistency in decision making, leverage the value of our newest offender risk and needs assessment tools, and improve the allocation of our residential and non-residential community services. This initiative has a go-live date of March 16, 2015 and is being completed within our existing budget.

The second initiative is the creation of a Reintegration Center. The vast majority of offenders currently incarcerated in Connecticut's prisons will return to the community, and many will do so in the next few years. There are over 1000 thousand incarcerated persons who are approved for discretionary release within the next 18 months and many more who will discharge at the end of sentence. As the prison population continues to decrease, corresponding with a declining crime rate, we will rededicate a 600 bed portion of the Willard Cybulski Correctional Institution to specifically serve the reentry population. We will deliver a program rich environment for those offenders who require assistance with matters related to

their program model. We anticipate engaging our staff, contracted non-profit partners, municipalities and our active volunteers in assisting us. Again, we will do this within our existing budget; our target completion date is April of this year.

The third initiative is a realignment of our internal policies related to Risk Reduction Earned Credit. We believe that Risk Reduction Earned Credit- or RREC has contributed to the recent reduction in crime that the state has experienced. We know with certainty as an agency that RREC has increased program participation and helped to reduce the instances of offender on staff and offender on offender assaults. We believe that we could maximize its efficacy as an incentive to promote positive and constructive behavior if we align RREC with our existing objective classification system. Briefly, this means that an offender at a high security level would not receive the full statutory benefit of RREC as much as offenders who are or have gradually transitioned to lower or minimum security levels. However, through an extended period of compliant behavior reliant upon our established objective classification system, an offender may progress to a lower security level and earn proportionately more RREC. Those offenders who fail to participate in programs or who remain a threat to staff or other offenders will not have the benefit of being considered for credits.

The final but by no means least important initiative is the reorganization of our parole supervision function. We anticipate that our decreasing facility population will result in an increase in the number of offenders who are supervised in the community. We need to recalibrate our organization to deal with this anticipated shift, and prepare our workforce for the change in focus. To this end, we will pursue a top-to-bottom examination of practices and structure of our Parole and Community Service Unit, increase community-specific training at our academy and prepare our institutional workforce for increased community involvement. When necessary, we will employ technical assistance and we shall measure our progress by partnering with local academic institutions.

Thank you for this opportunity to come before you today. I am humbled and honored to present before you and will remain focused and committed to advancing this agency in a positive direction.

I would be happy to respond to any questions you may have.